



# THE CULTURAL BELIEFS REGARDING PERINATAL DIETARY TABOOS

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## ABSTRACT

Dietary prohibitions are very usual among around the country, which are specifically discernible during the perinatal phase. In India, gravid mothers are shelled with various instructions that they become confused about what to consume and what to avoid. A study a mixed research approach was conducted to identify the cultural beliefs regarding perinatal dietary taboos. 36 participants were selected by purposive sampling technique and data was collected by taboo structured questionnaire and open ended questionnaire. The overall finding of both qualitative and quantitative study shows that people have different views regarding the consumption of different food items. The foods which have been beneficial and healthy for the growth and development of the baby are all green leafy vegetables, lentils, butter, saffron and fruits such as custard apple, pine apple and pomegranate, which serve to be essential nutrients whereas food which should not be consumed by the mother during pregnancy and lactation have harmful effects are papaya, brinjal, lentil (urad Dal), hot foods items (meat, fish, egg, chillies, tea), green leafy vegetables and cold foods etc and shows that there is significant association between consumption of food item during perinatal period with selected demographic variable.

**KEY-WORDS:** Assess, cultural beliefs, folk fares, pregnancy, lactation, diet, food habits.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

All people who are residing in rural and urban area are having their own faiths and their implications. Some beliefs are build on their hit and miss theory from centuries and at the same time some have constructive or effective values and some are useless and have negative effects. This may be true or false for food also.

According to Gillett (1990), the great issue with food prohibition is restricting a pregnant women to consume a well-balanced diet is the belief that overstepping of superstitious beliefs may anguish the mother and baby. Therefore, abortions, complications during labor or newborn being born with congenital deformities are often convinced to be caused by the mother, who may have eaten certain foods which are prohibited during perinatal period. According to Gibbs (2010) "In the wiser area on the disabled and their families indicated that more than 7% of disabilities, in particular blindness and limb deformation are believed to be caused by forbidden food taboos."

World health report 2003 conveyed that information about the maternal health and nutrition which should be increase in order to improve the health status of the mothers by NGO and governmental organizations. Study conducted in Tamilnadu conveyed that most of the participant (82%) avoided papaya during pregnancy. Study conducted in, Pondicherry resulted that 63.7% participants avoids various fruits and vegetable during pregnancy and lactation as a result of their traditional values. As a result, there is lack of comprehensive information regarding maternal nutrition.[4] Hence there is poor knowledge regarding practice of perinatal taboos therefore this study is aimed to assess existing cultural beliefs and practices regarding perinatal dietary taboos.

## Objectives:

- To assess the beliefs on perinatal dietary taboos among women by using semi-structured open ended questionnaires.
- To assess the beliefs on perinatal dietary taboos among women by using structured taboos activity questionnaires
- To integrate the qualitative and quantitative data on cultural beliefs regarding perinatal dietary taboos among women.
- To find the association between the level of consumption regarding perinatal dietary taboos and selected demographic variables.

## Hypothesis:

- H0:** There is no significant association between the frequency of consumption of food items with the selected demographic variables of women in selected rural areas of Moradabad.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

**2.1 Research approach:** Mixed research approach (Qualitative and Quantitative)

**2.2 Research design:** Ethnographic (Etic perspective) and descriptive research

design [Embedded design –QUAL (quan)]

**2.3 Sampling Technique:** Purposive Sampling Technique (Nested sampling)

**2.4 Sample:** Women aged between 18 years to 60 years

**2.4 Tool:** Structured taboo activity questionnaire and Open Ended Questionnaire

**2.5 Data Collection:** Questionnaire and In-depth Interview

**2.6 Data Analysis:** descriptive, inferential by SPSS 20 version and thematic analysis.

## 3. RESULTS:

### 3.1 Section A: Description of sample characteristics

The analyzed data reveals that the majority of the participant (33.3%) are in the age group of 31 to 40 years and 27.8% participants are in the age of 41 to 50 years, most of the participants (70%) are from muslim religion and 50 % participants having secondary education and 44.4 % having primary education and 86.1 % were home maker, 78.8 % were non vegetarian and 91.7% were multigravida and 72.2 % were from nuclear family.

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of demographic characteristics of women.**

N=36			
S.NO	Demographic characteristics	f	%
1.	Age in years	9	25
	a) ≤ 30 years	12	33.3
	b) 31 to 40 years	10	27.8
	c) 41 to 50 years	5	13.9
	d) 51 to 60 years		
2.	Educational status	0	00
	a) No formal education	16	44.4
	b) Primary education	18	50
	c) Secondary education	2	5.6
	d) Graduation	0	00
3.	Religion	9	25
	a) Hindu	27	75
4.	Employment	0	00
	a) Farmer	31	86.1
	b) Home maker	3	8.3
	c) Employed	2	5.6
	d) Self employed		
5.	Dietary pattern	8	22.2
	a) Vegetarian	28	77.8
	b) Non vegetarian		

6.	Gravid a) Primigravida b) Multigravida	3 33	8.3 91.7
7.	Parity a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) More than 3	4 4 13 15	11.1 11.1 36.1 41.7
8.	Monthly family income (in Rupees) a) Below 5000 b) 5000-10000 c) 10001-15000 d) Above 15000	0 28 7 01	0 77.8 19.4 2.8
9.	Type of family a) Nuclear b) Joint	26 10	72.2 27.8

### 3.2 Section B: Assessment of perinatal dietary taboos.

**Table 2: Percentage of consumption of food items during perinatal period.**

N=36

S. NO	FOOD ITEMS	SHALL NOT BE CONSUMED		CAN BE CONSUMED		DON'T KNOW	
		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Ripe papaya	21	58.3	14	38.9	1	2.8
2.	Raw papaya	9	25	25	69.4	2	5.6
3.	Pine apple	5	13.9	25	69.4	6	16.7
4.	Custard apple	0	0	35	97.2	1	2.8
5.	Grapes (all varieties)	0	0	36	100	0	0
6.	Raw mango	9	25	27	75	0	0
7.	Banana	2	5.6	34	94.4	0	0
8.	Green leafy veg.	0	0	36	100	0	0
9.	Tomato	4	11.1	32	88.9	0	0
10.	Ripe papaya	21	58.3	14	38.9	1	2.8
11.	Yam	19	52.8	12	33.3	5	13.9
12.	Amla	6	16.7	29	80.6	1	2.8
13.	Curd	0	0	36	100	0	0
14.	Butter	1	2.8	35	97.2	0	0
15.	Meat	25	69.4	11	30.6	0	0
16.	Chicken	18	50	18	50	0	0
17.	Fish	19	52.8	16	44.4	1	2.8
18.	Egg	28	77.8	8	22.2	0	0
19.	Millet and Grains	18	50	14	38.9	4	11.1
20.	Ash	16	44.4	1	2.8	19	52.8
21.	Hot beverages	9	25	26	72.2	1	2.8
22.	Saffron	0	0	36	100	0	0
23.	Betel leaves	1	2.8	26	72.2	9	25

### 3.3 Section C: Association between the frequency of consumption food item and selected demographic variable

Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level

H0: There is no significant association between the frequency of consumption of food items with the selected demographic variables of women in selected rural areas of Moradabad.

There is no significant association found between consumption of Ripe papaya, Raw papaya, Pine apple, Custard apple, Raw mango, Banana, Tomato, Yam, Amla, Meat, Chicken, Fish, Egg, Millets and Grains, Ash, Hot beverages, Betel leaves, Jaggery with the Age in years, Religion, Dietary pattern, Gravida.

There is significant association found between tomato and egg with age and banana with gravida.

Hence, the H0 is rejected.

### 3.4 Section D: Cultural Beliefs regarding Perinatal Dietary taboos

#### 1. Foods to be included in healthy diet is-

Eating essential nutritional food items are required for a healthy being and a balance diet is one in which one should include all essential nutrients, so people have some common beliefs regarding some food items such as lentils, green vegetables fruits and milk. People believe that the milk is the most important food for healthy diet. "Green vegetables, cereals, milk chapattis, rice and ghee etc comes in a healthy diet." (Participant 4). "A healthy diet is that which contains all the nutritious ingredients." (Participant 6)

#### 2. Food believed to be beneficial during pregnancy:

All women had opinion that eating more than the normal diet is beneficial for them during pregnancy as it will fulfill the need of mother as well as of baby. Basically they focuses on some specific fruits and vegetables as they are very much fond of eating apple, pomegranate (RED FRUITS), green gram lentils, green leafy vegetables, milk, rice, wheat chapattis, dry fruits, oats as these foods are effective for the digestion, good hemoglobin of mother and growth of baby. People even consider some food items which helpful for the baby to be fair in color.

"Milk, green vegetables like spinach and red fruits like apple and pomegranate should be eaten in increased amount" (Participant 4)

"Drinking milk with saffron and eating almonds and coconut will make the baby's color fair" (Participant 4)

#### 3. Food believed to be beneficial in lactation:

There are some food items that help to boost lactation by enhancing the milk production during postnatal period. People believes that more milk, cereals, green leafy vegetables and fried cumin seeds with milk and eating the "HARIRA"

"Split green gram, red cereal and fried cumin milk should be given to enhance the milk production" (Participant 2)

"Fry split green gram cereal with cumin seed and asafetida, harira and give to mother for good milk production" (Participant 3)

#### 4. Food believed to be harmful during pregnancy:

Eating some foods and drinks may increase the risk of harm to the mother and the baby. Some of the food decreases the growth of baby and some of the food items may lead to discomfort to mother as well, so such food must be avoided.

"Badi food should not be eaten like the root foods such as yam (arbi), cauliflower, split yellow lentil etc" (Participant 2)

"Heavy food items should not be eaten like brinjal jackfruit, bittergourd and black gram, split chickpeas." (Participant 8)

#### 5. Food believed to be harmful in lactation:

Consumption of some foods and drinks may decrease the milk production and can affect the digestion of baby. Women believes that there are some food items which are taken by mother can affect baby as whatever mother eats goes to the baby by the milk,

So they considered hard edibles (kada khadya pradarth) such as chapattis of maize flour, buckwheat flour, and rice flour can cause the constipation to the baby, green leafy vegetables cause green loose motions and vomiting in babies and badi food causes abdominal pain to the baby due to gas formation.

"Avoid kidney beans, black eyed bean, gram and chickpeas as it decreases the milk production and avoid cold food items too because whatever you eat that will affects the baby too so do not eat green leafy vegetables like radish greens and spinach and all" (Participant 1)

#### 6. Foods believed as abortifacient.

There are beliefs regarding foods that can cause miscarriage in early pregnancy like papaya, hot foods (fish, meat, egg, chillies, and spices) although they say that it is luck but they do believe that some food items can lead to abortion in the early weeks of pregnancy.

"Hot foods are forbidden such as buckwheat flour, split yellow cereals, jaggery, bittergourd and brinjal as they can lead to miscarriage." (Participant 2)

"Drinking sugar syrup can lead to abortion" (Participant 2)

### 3.5 Integration of findings:

The overall finding of both qualitative and quantitative study shows that people have different views regarding the consumption of different food items. The foods which have been beneficial and healthy for the baby are all green leafy vegetables 100%, curd 100%, grapes 100%, tomatoes & custard apple 97.2%, saffron 100%, butter 97.2% and jaggery 94.4% as respective percentage participants agreed that these food items can be consumed and most of verbatim supported green leafy vegetable, apples, saffron jaggery can be eaten during perinatal period as (Participant 5) said that juice, milk, green vegetable should be eaten very well like spinach, tomatoes and cereals, these all things are good. At

the same time there are some food items which can be eaten in pregnancy but avoided during lactational period such as green leafy vegetables should be avoided as they can disturb the digestive system of baby as (Participant 1) said that avoid cold food items too because whatever you eat that will affects the baby too so do not eat green leafy vegetables like radish greens and spinach and all.

People even believes that some food items should be avoided as they can harmful for the mother as well as for the baby so people avoids, brinjal and some cereals, 58.3% participants said that ripe papaya, 52.8 % said yam , 69.4% said meat, 50% said chicken, 52.8% said fish, 77.8% said egg and 50 % said that millets and grains shall not be consumed during perinatal period and many verbatim also reveals that such food items should not be taken during perinatal period as (Participant 2) said hot foods are forbidden such as buckwheat flour, split yellow cereals, jaggery, bittergourd and brinjal as they can lead to miscarriage and (Participant 4) said that papaya should be avoided it increases the chances of miscarriage,

#### 4. DISCUSSION:

The overall finding of study shows foods which have been beneficial and healthy for the growth and development of the baby. The findings of the present study revealed that there is significant association between the frequency of consumption of food items and selected demographic variables. In similar study of Kouser et al conducted among women in which 64% avoided ripe papaya and 89 % avoided raw papaya etc Rajkumar Patil et al in 2010 revealed findings by using statistical analysis that majority of food items has the significant association between food items and selected demographic variables.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS:

100% participants said that grapes (all varieties) green leafy vegetable, curd and saffron, 97.2 % said custard apple, 94.4% said banana, 97.2 % said butter and 94.4 % said jaggery, 88.9 said tomato and 80.6 % said amla can be consumed during perinatal period at same time 77.8 % said egg, 69.4 % said meat, 58.3% said ripe papaya 52.8% said fish and yam shall not be consumed during perinatal period where as the foods which have been beneficial and healthy for the growth and development of the baby are all green leafy vegetables, lentils, butter, saffron and fruits such as custard apple, pine apple and pomegranate which serve to be essential nutrients whereas food which should not be consumed by the mother during pregnancy and lactation have harmful effects are papaya, brinjal, lentil (urad dal), hot foods items (meat, fish, egg, chillies, tea), green leafy vegetables and cold foods etc.

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